

# GHB - the CEWG perspective

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December 1990

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**Miami** "Florida Poison Information Center reports 7 cases of adverse effects"

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June 1991

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**Miami** "at least 7 cases of adverse effects . . ."

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June 1993

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**New York City** - "GHB has recently become available in nightclubs"  
Mixed with amphetamine; mixture called "Max"

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December 1993

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**Miami** - resurfaced as drug of abuse in nightclubs, among body builders

**New York City** - "still available in nightclubs"

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June 1994

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**Miami** - 5 accidental overdoses. The drug has resurfaced since it was banned over 3 years ago. It is marketed in nightclubs and among body builders.

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December 1994

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**Miami** - "at least 7 overdoses in 1994"

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June 1995

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**Boston** - reports from Rhode Island of a cocktail mixture of GHB and amphetamine

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June 1996

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**Texas** "has become a problem in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area"

**Miami** -increased reports abuse in club settings

**New Orleans** "GHB becoming widely available and abused"

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December 1996

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**Atlanta**- "remains available and has become popular"

**Detroit** - Used in nightclubs for effects similar to flunitrazepam

**Miami**- made in homemade labs and associated with sexual assault and robbery

**New York City** "GHB is more conspicuous" GHB & ketamine & alcohol = "Special K-lude"

**Phoenix** "increased at raves and nightclubs"

**Texas** "GHB use is spreading across the state" "scoop" ED mentions

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June 1997

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**Atlanta** - GHB used in gyms and fitness centers

**Baltimore** - raves are a source of GHB

**Boston** - GHB synthesized by college students, implicated in poisonings with alcohol

**Detroit** - several seizures of GHB

**Honolulu** - DEA reports in Honolulu nightlife scene

**Miami** - GHB emerged as homemade club drug responsible for increasing number of medical emergencies. State law makes GHB Schedule 2.

**New York City** - GHB used by club patrons

**Phoenix** - GHB used at raves, nightclubs, gay clubs as a pleasure enhancer

**San Francisco** - Internet recipe for GHB being used. Marked increase in ED mentions

**Texas** - GHB becoming more commonly used in Texas

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December 1997

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**Atlanta**- used among adolescents and young adults in the urban club scene

**Baltimore**- GHB available

**Boston**- availability increased recently in connection with clubs and raves

**Honolulu**- GHB available in small amounts in Oahu's nightclub scene

**Miami** - "GHB is the fastest growing new problem in the depressant category, replacing flunitrazepam. GHB clandestine labs in Jacksonville area.

**Newark**- recipes on Internet and ads for precursors proliferate

**New York City** - GHB especially visible in nightclubs

**San Francisco**- "GHB has made a strong debut on the local club and party scene" Used by men and women, gay and straight, as a disinhibiting party drug

**Texas** -28 overdoses of GHB in 1997

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June 1998

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**Atlanta-** GHB at gay circuit parties and at nightclubs

**Baltimore-** available

**Boston-** GHB still legal and not controlled in MA, 2 clan labs

**Detroit** – 3 law enforcement seizures

**Miami-** "dramatic increase in GHB medical emergencies especially for those under age 20. A GHB analog appears

**New Orleans-** GHB shipped overnight in to LA and New Orleans from Texas

**Phoenix-** GHB as date rape drug, cooked on stove top labs

**San Diego** – GHB in media accounts

**San Francisco-** Club drugs not seen much except for GHB

**Texas-** GHB overdoses increasingly reported/110 poison center calls regarding GHB

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December 1998

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**Atlanta** – GHB available, popular

**Boston-** GHB now controlled, implicated in rapes, poisonings, and deaths  
"slight overdose can cause drowsiness or unconsciousness"

**Denver-** daily users tend to be in teens or twenties. During parties GHB is often given away

**Detroit** – GHB schedule I in Michigan effective July 1998

**Miami** - "GHB and its analogs are widely abused, increasingly by adolescents"  
4 deaths in Broward County, FL (Ft. Lauderdale)

**Minneapolis-** GHB surfaced as new drug of abuse among adolescents and  
appeared in city crime labs

**Seattle** - several reports of drug rape with GHB and homicide  
One ED case every other week "This trend bears watching."

**Texas-** "GHB overdoses, some with life threatening symptoms continue to be reported. 71 Poison  
Center calls in first half of 1998.

SPECIAL REPORT:

***GHB Overdoses and Deaths in South Florida***  
Joe Spillane, Pharm. D., ABAT and  
Madeline Camejo, Pharm.D.

**CEWG Meeting Summary:**

"GHB continues to spread across the country, with recipes proliferating on the Internet. It has been increasingly involved in poisonings, overdoses, date rapes and fatalities in at least 14 CEWG areas, up from 8 last year. GHB is a rave drug used mostly by adolescents and young adults in: Baltimore, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, Newark, New Orleans, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Arizona, and Texas. GBL and 1,4 BD metabolize in to GHB in the body and produce GHB-like symptoms."

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December 1999

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**Atlanta:** "Reports of overdoses from a combination of GHB and alcohol among gay men suggest that the drug continues to be available and popular in certain settings. "

**Baltimore:** GHB/GBL was responsible for 10 overdoses in the first 3 months of 1999.

**Boston:** "Heavy GHB use has been reported in some Boston clubs, some-times associated with overdoses requiring ED treatment. "

**Newark** - a GHB precursor (GBL) was suspected of sending 18 people to hospitals, and 2 GBL-related overdoses were reported among Princeton students.

**Minneapolis** - one to five GHB-related overdoses are treated per month. Minnesota legislature designated GHB and its salts, compounds, derivatives or preparations as Schedule III controlled substances, effective August 1, 1999

**San Francisco** - "The most often mentioned 'club drug' lately, at least among gay men, has been GHB as well as its precursor, gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) or 'Blue Nitro. '"

**Seattle** - ED staff continue to report anecdotal accounts of three to four incidents per month of incapacitation, induced intoxication, rape and other criminal behaviors.

**South Florida:** "Eleven of the 26 ED patients with GHB toxicity in the first half of 1999 were completely comatose, 3 experienced respiratory failure requiring endotracheal intubation, and 9 were combative at some point during their visit. "

**Meeting Summary/Advance Report:**

"On March 13, 2000, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) was placed in Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act. GHB is easily produced by combining gamma butyrolactone (GBL) with either potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide in a container. Kits for making the drug are sold over the Internet. Because the drug is easily synthesized and manufactured, local operators serve as distributors. GHB is usually sold by the capful at a cost of \$5 to \$10 per cap.

Overdose of GHB can occur rapidly and may produce dizziness, drowsiness, nausea, and visual disturbances. Higher dosages can lead to unconsciousness, seizures, severe respiratory depression, and coma. Overdoses typically require emergency room treatment and, for coma and respiratory depression, intensive care. In 1999, the Food and Drug Administration received 122 reports of GHB abuse from health professionals. The DEA documented 60 GHB-related deaths as of January 2000; almost 60 percent of the deaths occurred among young people age 20 to 29.

GBL, the precursor chemical for the manufacture of GHB, has been marketed as a health supplement and became a List 1 chemical on February 18, 2000. Kits for manufacturing GBL are sold on the Internet. GBL also is synthesized in the body to produce GHB so that some partygoers drink small quantities of GBL "straight." This often causes violent regurgitation of the fluid or other severe reactions.

**Atlanta** - GHB is increasingly available

**Boston** The Massachusetts Poison Control Center reported receiving more calls involving GHB and its precursor GBL than was the case for other club drugs. GHB/GBL accounted for 32 percent of illicit drug-related calls.

**Chicago** GHB is sold as a liquid in amounts ranging from drops from a dropper (at raves or parties) to capfuls.

**Detroit** The Detroit Poison Control Center reported 100 cases of GHB/GBL in 1999, with 22 of these being life-threatening. Six cases involved GHB.

**Los Angeles** GHB use continues to increase in Los Angeles.

**Minneapolis** - Two GHB toxicity deaths occurred in 1999. A growing but small number of people who sought treatment reported GHB/GBL as the primary substance of abuse, physical dependence, tolerance, and withdrawal

**Newark** GHB is routinely used at rave parties and around college campuses. GBL was recently linked to 18 hospitalizations.

**St. Louis** GHB use increased in the St. Louis area. Five GHB-related deaths were reported in Missouri. GHB is sold in clubs for \$5 a capful or \$40 an ounce.

**San Francisco** GHB is available but that it is not as commonly used as MDMA.

**Texas** GHB, GBL, and similar precursor drugs remain a serious problem. Increasing cases were reported by poison control centers in 1999.

**23 GHB-related deaths** reported in five CEWG areas: 2 in Minneapolis/St. Paul (in 1999); 9 in Broward County (between 1996 and the first half of 2000); 3 in Miami-Dade County (since July 1999); 3 in Texas (in 1999); one in Washington State; and 5 in Missouri.

**Atlanta** - "GHB is easily accessible at raves and is commonly used by both teenagers and young adults. The DEA continues to report that its use is associated with sexual assault."

**Boston** - "In press reports, GHB, often called 'liquid ecstasy' or 'liquid X,' is sometimes confused with ecstasy. Although both are so-called club drugs and are often used in the same settings, their effects are quite distinct, with GHB presenting higher risk for both overdose and dependence."

**Chicago** - "Compared with other club drugs, overdose experiences are more frequent with GHB, especially when used in combination with alcohol. GHB is not tracked in most quantitative indicators, but use is perceived to be low in comparison to that of ecstasy."

**Detroit** - reports of GHB and GBL abuse have been numerous and continuing in 1999 and 2000.

**Los Angeles** - GHB continues to be a major club drug

**Minneapolis** - a St. Paul hospital ED reports treating 5 GHB-related cases per week since September

**Missouri** - Two near-deaths reported in St. Charles, Missouri, where GHB was used for drug rape.

**Newark** - It is increasingly reported that GHB and ketamine are used at rave parties around college campuses. "Unfortunately no reporting system tracks the use of such substances in the state."

**Phoenix** - GHB and GBL are readily available.

**South Florida** - "when GBL products were banned, new brand names for 1,4 butanediol products appeared almost weekly, and overdose and addiction are reported frequently. In virtually every GHB-related case, the reason for the ED visit was decreased responsiveness/coma usually lasting less than 3 hours."

**Texas** - "GHB and its precursors remain a dangerous problem, with poison control center cases increasing in 1999.

**Washington DC** - GHB used by individuals who attend music and dance clubs. "Some club owners do not want to deal with the problems that people suffer from when taking GHB (especially with alcohol) on their premises. They are now removing GHB users and dealers from their clubs."

*compiled by Carol Falkowski, June 2001*